

# 土地神信仰的跨國比較研究

歷史、族群、節慶與文化遺產

Transnational Comparative Studies on the Earth God Belief  
History, Ethnicity, Festival and Cultural Heritage

● 徐雨村、張維安、羅烈師 主編 ●



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# The Veneration of Dayak Latok among Chinese in Singkawang, West Kalimantan

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper describes the worship of Dayak deity among Chinese in Singkawang, West Kalimantan. The belief of Datuk Kong 拿督公, a Malay deity is a common phenomenon among Chinese in East and West Malaysia. Many Tua Pek Kong temples in Sarawak (East Malaysia) house one or a few subsidiary Datuk Kong deities. There are also temples devoted to Datuk Kong as its main deity in Central region of Sarawak. However, the veneration of Latok Kong 啦督公, the Dayak deity is unheard of in Sarawak and is totally confined to the neighbouring Chinese in West Kalimantan. Rituals, beliefs and symbols are constantly adapted, transformed to stabilise and cater to the emotional needs of the community. Tua Pek Kong, Datuk Kong, Latok Kong are local tutelary deities believed to protect and help its people. Thus, it is the humble aim of this ethnographic paper provide further understanding into the reflexivity and adaptivity of Chinese folk beliefs towards its social surrounding.*

**Keywords :** Latok Kong, Datuk Kong, Tua Pek Kong, West Kalimantan, Singkawang

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## Background of the Study

*Datok Batu Hitam, Datok Bujang Pelanduk, Datok Gelang Putih, Datok Gunung Besi, Datok Habal, Datok Hitam, Datok Iban, Datok Kuning, Datok Tanjung Kemuning, Datok Tujuh Pulau, Datok Ular Putih, Nek Sukgi, Nek Datuk Iban, Datuk Nek Macan, Datuk Nek Riup* are among those joining the procession of 232 spirit mediums in Singkawang on 22 February 2016. These spirit mediums adorned headgear with hornbill casque, and their costumes are embellished with porcupine quills, monkey and vivet skulls, and a few wild boar tusks. The female mediums wore mostly knee length skirt with traditional motives accompanied by headgear made from beads. The rest of the mediums wore costumes of Chinese Ming warriors and the female wore costumes resembling those of Tang or Ming dynasty. From the assemble of costumes, the ethnicity of the mediums can be easily identifiable. Those wearing the traditional Dayak costumes represent the Dayak mediums while those adorned the Ming or Tang costume embody Chinese mediums.

The presence of the heavily costumed spirit mediums and their mortification act with rod and skewers pierced through their cheek, and their prowess on knives laden, nail studded sedan chairs have attracted visitors from all over the world. This event is known internationally as Cap Go Meh procession, but locally among the Indonesian it is called the *Pawai Tatung* (Parade of Tatung).<sup>①</sup> *Tatung* indicates a person with the ability to be possessed by supernatural beings such as deities or gods. The usage of the term *tatung*<sup>②</sup> has been popularised ever

① The local Chinese call the day as 'Zhang Yet Ban' (正月半).

② However among the local Hakka, the word 'tatung' is a less popular term used for spirit medium. A more favourable term used by the local Hakka for such person is 'Phan Tung' and upon inquisition there are Chinese characters for it, which is 邦童. The exact meaning for the words is not known upon inquisition. The general answer is that a person who is able to 'phan tung' is someone who is chosen by deities to utilise his or her body. Another widely used name among the local is someone who can 'Cho Ki' (坐基) which also means someone who is able to be possessed by deities. A few elderly men and women opined that the word 'tatung' is a rougher word and they call it in Hakka as 'Tu fa' (土話) or 'Chu fa' (粗話). Instead, 'Phan Tung' and 'Cho Ki' is a much polite word to be used. In Sarawak, the Hakka call a person with the same ability as "Tung Shin" (童身) and the



since Cap Go Meh procession was incorporated as a national tourism event for Indonesia starting year 2009. There are other terms used more generally by the local Chinese such as 'Phan Tung' or 'Cho Ki'.

Journalists and researchers have written about the annual event by focusing on the connotations of the event as a form of recognition in West Kalimantan's multi ethnicity, and uphold the advocacy of the government in its motto of "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity). Margaret Chan indicates that, "By staging an army of *latoks* drawn from the three ethnic pillars of West Kalimantan, the Chinese signified themselves as brethren to the Dayak and Malays, rooted and entitled, as part of the 'peoplehood' of West Kalimantan" (2013:2). The portrayals of Chinese as Malay Datoks and Dayak Latoks herald their open acceptance, respect and embracement of other ethnic groups in post Suharto era. It is not just about presenting themselves as the people of the land, but rather as a form of open recognition of their presence and to imprint it in the social cultural landscape the new government is welcoming. However successful the event have been, it has nonetheless attracted resentments from Islamic quarters and also animal right groups over the years due to the participation of Muslim as spirit mediums and also the bizarre scene of puppies, chicken been savoured alived by the mediums.

This paper attempts to supplement knowledge on the belief of Dayak deity among Chinese in Singkawang. Only Chan has written briefly about the Dayak gods and spirit mediums during Cap Go Meh celebration.<sup>⑤</sup> The veneration of the indigenous deity is not found in Sarawak even though the population demography of Sarawak is rather similar to West Kalimantan with Dayak being the majority

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verb to describe such act as "Lok Tung" (落童).

\*The Hakka pronunciation depicted in this paper is according to the written Hakka used by local Singkawang. In text messages, facebook messages, etc., it is common for them to romanised the dialect and the romanised Hakka remains uniquely uniform and intelligible. The romanised Hakka pronunciation will be presented along with the Chinese words. For Chinese words in pinyin, (M) will be indicated.

⑤ See Margaret Chan's impressive articles (Chan 2009, 2013) on Chinese New Year celebration in Singkawang for year 2007 and 2008.

group. The population of Chinese are also significant in Sarawak as it is the second largest group after the Dayak. For Singkawang, it is considered as the town with the highest Chinese population percentage in Indonesia, as 50% of its 200,000 population is Chinese Hakka.

There is so far no records nor literature on the worship of Dayak deity by Chinese in Sarawak. The attestation is further provided by the author's observation and work on Chinese beliefs in Sarawak since 2008. Fieldwork to all Tua Pek Kong temples (Chai 2014) and also altars, temples in timber logging camps, oil palm plantations in Sarawak substantiate the fact that the only non-Chinese deity being venerated is Malay Datuk Kong. From the 76 Tua Pek Kong temples, 35 has Datuk Kong as its subsidiary deities. The rest of the subsidiary deities are Chinese deities. The altar of Datuk Kong is exclusively placed outside the main temple, by the side or in front. It is never inside the main temple hall, unless if the temple is devoted to Datuk Kong as its main deity like the case of Sebauh<sup>4</sup> temple.

The empirical data was collected from July until November 2016, for a research collaboration with Beijing Foreign Studies University.<sup>5</sup> A book focusing on temple and tatung tradition was published in 2017 (Chai 2017) as part of findings of fieldwork in West Kalimantan. Subsequent short trips were made from February until April 2017 to look at the Cap Go Meh event and other Chinese calendrical rituals.

## Between Datok, Datuk or Latok

The term of Datok and Datuk is used interchangeably indicating the same meaning, 'grandfather' in Malaysian language. The difference in the vowel 'o' and

<sup>4</sup> Sebauh is located 120km from Bintulu, a coastal in northern part of Sarawak.

<sup>5</sup> 北京外國語大學青年學術創新團隊項目支持計劃 with project title of "Intersection of Different Civilizations: the Social and Cultural Changes in Borneo" (在文明的交匯處——婆羅洲的社會文化變遷).



'u' was a move to standardize the Malay language in the early 80s under the Sistem Bahasa Baku (Language Standardization System). Datok was the older version used and to standardize the national language, the vowel of 'o' is replaced by 'u' in the case of this word, making the formal spelling for grandfather as "Datuk". The move towards the use of a formal language involved the standardization in grammar, spelling, pronunciation, structure and use of sentences in a formal way. In September 1993, an official circular<sup>6</sup> was disseminated to all government schools to inform the compulsion in using sebutan baku (formal pronunciation) in all government schools and oral examinations are also based on the Sistem Bahasa Baku. However, the use of "Datok" still persists in pronunciation even after the Sistem Bahasa Baku move in Malaysia. The colloquial version is still used widely in daily conversation.

In Indonesian language, the word used for 'grandfather' is 'kakek' and 'datuk' means 'great grandfather'. The national language of Indonesia adopts the Javanese, Bugis, Minangkabau and Malay words due to the diverse ethnic group speaking the same Austronesia group of language. In West Kalimantan, the second largest ethnic group after Dayak is the Malay.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the word "Datuk" could mean 'grandfather' and also 'great grandfather' for a local in West Kalimantan. The Chinese being the third largest group in West Kalimantan are equally exposed to the meaning of 'Datuk' in the local and national context. Like the case of Malaysia, the colloquial version of "Datok" seems to be more prevalent. Even in the official registration of tatungs by the Cap Goh Meh committee in 2016 (*Panitia Festival Cap Go Meh Singkawang*), the Dayak deities are written as "Datok", instead of "Datuk". On altars in Singkawang, name of Dayak deity written as "Datok xxx" seems to be the convention but not dismissing the fact that

<sup>6</sup> Surat Pekeliling Ikhtisas Bil. 2/1993 Tarikh Penyempurnaan Pelaksanaan Bahasa Melayu Sebutan Baku

<sup>7</sup> According to the 2016 data from Statistical Body of West Kalimantan (Badan Statistik Kalimantan Barat), West Kalimantan has a population of 4,716,093 people. The largest ethnic group is Dayak (32.75%), followed by Malay (29.75%), Chinese (29.21%), Javanese (5.25%), Bugis (0.3%) and others (9.85%).

some also uses the official “Datuk” version, as in the case of a “Datuk Panglima Hitam” altar in Central Singkawang.

The term “Latok” is used interchangeably with “Datok” to address Dayak deity among the local Chinese. The ‘la’ word derives from the address of indigenous people as “La ci” (拉子) in Hakka dialect. In Sarawak, the same is addressed to the Dayaks with slight variation among the different dialects. The Hakka uses “La zi” or “La’a” while the Teochew and Hokkien use “La kia”. Although the Hakka dialect in Singkawang and Sarawak is of the same group, there is slight variation in the last syllabus used – “La ci” in Singkawang and “La zi” in Sarawak. However, the term ‘la zi’ or ‘la kia’ has caused quite a stir in the political arena in Sarawak when Dayak leaders proclaimed the term as derogatory with negative connotations of being uncivilised or low class. Thus, in Sarawak, Chinese are becoming more discreet in the colloquial usage when addressing a Dayak person. In Singkawang, when the fieldwork was taking place, the same trend seemed to be apparent. When a Chinese speaks to another Chinese, they casually use the term “La ci”. However, when the setting is more formal, Chinese will use “Dayak” as in Bahasa Indonesia even when the conversation is in Hakka dialect. They refrain from using the colloquial address in public or formal setting for fear of causing uneasiness or sensitivity towards ethnic issue.

The usage of “Datok” has been formalised at the Office of Buddhist Community of Guidance (BIMAS Buddha) Singkawang, which is under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Kementerian Agama Bimbingan Masyarakat Buddha, Kota Singkawang*). Tatung with affiliation to a temple or altar (*cetiya or vihara*) in Singkawang are encouraged to register at the office in order to qualify for the tatung parade during Cap Go Meh celebration. The registration is valid for 3 years and must be completed one year before. In the list of registration of BIMAS Buddha Singkawang and in West Kalimantan as a whole, temples worshipping Dayak deity are listed with the name “Datok”. For instance a temple at North Singkawang, nearby Sungai Garam Hilir is registered as Cetiya Datok.



Bujang Hitam. Under the categorization of the Buddhist Board of Development (*Lembaga Pembinaan Keagamaan Buddha*) in Singkawang, '*cetiya*' denotes temple or altar with layout size of no larger than 4x6m<sup>2</sup>. Those larger than 4x6m<sup>2</sup> are classified as '*vihara*'. Although there are altars devoted to the worship of Malay deities, the matter has caused strong resentment and objection from the Muslim Board. There were many instances of open disputes and scuffles about the participation of the Malays in the parade of tatung. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the presence of Malay deities in Singkawang nor the participation of Malays during Cap Go Meh event.

### The Realm of the 'Penunggu'

The local including the Chinese strongly believe in the existence of 'penunggu' (inhabitor). Every place, especially rocks, hill, river, trees are inhabited by a penunggu. The penunggu usually do not cause harm unless if its boundary is trespassed or is disturbed. Isolated places and deserted areas are believed to be inhabited by penunggu. Penunggu is different from ghost or spirits as penunggu are believed to have existed in the area for a long time. They are the inhabitant of the place, thus the owner of the place. There are many stories about penunggu appearing at the backyard of a house, in the middle of a road, or nearby construction area. The occurrence of penunggu will not cause harm unless if it is angered. Angered penunggu will cause menaces and most often than not, cause sickness, insanity or even death. Penunggu has the physical features of animals such as tiger, buffalo, snake, monkey and some has anthropomorphic images of being half human and half animal.

Encounters with penunggu seem to be rather usual whereby almost everyone can tell a related incident. A walk in the jungle might cause some untoward brush with penunggu when its habitat has been stepped upon. A pee at the roadside might also irked a penunggu as its 'home' has been urinated. Children who cry incessantly at night might have encountered a penunggu while playing at the

yard, or while fetching a ball the child might have accidentally stepped on the 'home' of a penunggu or even the tail of a penunggu.

Stories about incidents with penunggu abound and seems not yielding much fright nor worries, as there are ways to placate the angered encounter. The common way is to seek help from a tatung. A tatung being possessed by a deity will communicate with the penunggu to find out the cause of rage. Usually a reconciliation will be suggested and offerings will be made to appease the penunggu. If the penunggu is unwilling to accept the offer or turned overtly ferocious, the tatung will conduct exorcism. This is however the least preferred option by most tatungs.

The following narrative depict the experience of a family living at Jalan Diponegoro, West Singkawang. A plot of land next to where the family lives is under clearance to pave way for a new hotel building. The family experienced the disturbance of penunggu. The encounter was told by the younger brother of the victim on 3rd July 2016.

"We were all sitting at the living room watching television one evening. Suddenly we heard a loud scream from the back. My sister rushed out and was holding onto one of her arms. She said when she was taking a shower, something sharp scratched her arm. We saw a long fingernail scratch on her arm. It looks like the scratch of an animal. I looked around the backyard but there was nothing. My sister said the door of the bathroom remained lock the whole time. My mother applied some cream on her wound. There was no blood but the wound was red and my sister complained pain. That night my mother had a nightmare of being chased by an animal that has human hands and legs. My mother was terrified to sleep and stay awake until dawn.

The next morning we decided to go to a *pekong*.<sup>⑧</sup> The tatung went into

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<sup>⑧</sup> This term is used when addressing place of worship for the Chinese among the local in West Kalimantan.



trance and *Pit Tet Ciong Kun*<sup>⑨</sup> appeared. The deity said a penunggu has harmed my sister because it is seeking for vengeance on its destroyed house. The bad dream was a message the penunggu conveys to my family. The deity told that, the penunggu has the intention to drive us out of our home as it has lost its home. It will not give in until we leave our home. We were terrified upon hearing this. It was not us who cleared the land. The developer did it. The deity told us to return the evening after the Muslim prayer<sup>⑩</sup> and bring along five types of flowers, daun *pinang*<sup>⑪</sup> and *mayang pinang*.<sup>⑫</sup>

That evening we went as told. The tatung went into trance and Datok Bujang Hitam appeared. Datok Bujang Hitam performed a cleansing ceremony on my sister. She was asked to drink a glass of water dipped with burned talisman. She was then asked to take bath with the five types of flowers. After that, Datok Bujang Hitam asked me to take him to meet the penunggu. Both of us left with his assistant. My sister waited at the temple with my mother and another sister.

Upon arrival at my house, the assistant burned *kemenyan*<sup>⑬</sup> and Datok Bujang Hitam stomped into my house swaying his *mandau*.<sup>⑭</sup> I didn't follow as the assistant asked me to stay outside. After a while, Datok came out and went to the empty land next door. He was seen swaying his mandau and sprinkling *beras kuning*<sup>⑮</sup> all over the place. Then I was told the penunggu has to be appeased and a chicken has to be slaughtered. Several other offerings

⑨ The name of a general deity (必德將軍).

⑩ Muslim prayer after sunset is called "Maghrib".

⑪ Areca leaves.

⑫ Palm spathe.

⑬ Frankincense.

⑭ Traditional weapon of Dayak in Kalimantan. It looks much like a machete. But the flat of the blade looks larger. The handle is usually made from deer antlers, crafted as head of bird and decorated with animal's fur or human hair.

⑮ Yellow rice. Rice is mixed with minced turmeric.

such as *pisang goreng*,<sup>⑥</sup> *keladi goreng*<sup>⑦</sup> and *lik ma pan*<sup>⑧</sup> together with incense, paper money were also required. We were asked to offer the food, and burned the incense, paper money on every *malam Jumaat*<sup>⑨</sup> for twelve times. My family did as told and only then peace was restored.”

Deals of reconciliation with *penunggu* usually involves placation with food offerings and burning of incense, paper money and candles. It is only in rare cases when exorcism takes place. As a very famous *tatung* in Singkawang puts it, “A *penunggu* should not be forced to leave, but if there is no other way, the *penunggu* should be invited to leave. But never by force. When man and supernatural beings are in good term, people will live in peace.”

An experienced *tatung* is with the ability to invoke different deity to descend into his or her body, after diagnosing the cause of the problem. In the case of the family, the *tatung* invoke the help of Dato Bujang Hitam, a Dayak deity after identifying the problem derives from a *penunggu*. Different deities are invoked to solve different problems and depend largely on the disposition and preference of the *tatung*. If a client is suffering from headache or body aches, a Chinese deity's help is usually sought. If the pain is believed to be an act of black magic, a Dayak deity's help will be asked. However, if a *tatung* believes a Chinese deity can dispel the black magic, he or she will invoke the Chinese deity to cure the afflicted victim. Similarly, if the preference of the *tatung* is a Dayak deity, a Latok will be invited to descend into the *tatung*'s body. The client's preference works much the same way. If a client believes a certain deity is more efficacious to offer remedy, the client will seek help from that particular deity. Among the local in Singkawang, the help and protection from Chinese and Dayak deities are equitably sought after. Chinese go to the Dayak deities for help just as they frequent the Chinese deities.

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⑥ Banana fritter.

⑦ Fried yam.

⑧ A local delicacy made from flour and sugar, and shaped like a hat.

⑨ Malam Jumaat denotes Thursday night in Indonesia. Whereas in Malaysia, it means Friday night. (Malam = night, Jumaat = Friday).



## The Pantheon of Chinese Deities

Before proceeding to understand Latok deity, it is vital to grasp the overall background of deities worshipped by Chinese in Singkawang. As with many Chinese communities, the local Chinese propitiate a range of deities from the famous Monkey God (齊天大聖), Third Prince (哪吒), Vagabond Buddha (濟公), Military God (關公), to military deities bearing titles of *Yuan Suai* (元帥). The pantheon of deities are diverse and wide ranging, and among it all, the veneration of *Pak Kung* (伯公) seems to be the most prevalent. Pak Kung is believed to be the guardian of a territory and is related directly to the land. He is comparable to the landlord of an area. Before the clearance of a land, the start of cultivation, mining activities, and even before setting ashore for fishing or water activities, Pak Kung's blessing and protection is seek. In this "City of a Thousand Temples", many temples are devoted to various Pak Kungs (官田伯公, 林山伯公, 青山伯公, 大伯公公, 泰山伯公, 白石伯公, 太王伯公, 林伯公公, 裕山伯公, 黄伯公, 青葉伯公, 水口伯公, 五方伯公) and the list goes on. Pak Kung is believed to guard over a locale and he doesn't trespass into another Pak Kung's territory unless invited, according to a temple chairman of Central Singkawang. He further explained that, "There is usually a temple in each area such as a village, a lane, foot of hill, end of rivermouth and at different corners of the town. A Pak Kung guarding the foot of a hill will not be efficacious at the rivermouth or at kampung and vice versa." This description best exemplify the function of Pak Kung as a tutelary deity watching and protecting over a territory.

The role of Tu Ti Kung (土地公) is believed to be similar to Pak Kung. In every temple under the main altar, the soil deity, Tu Ti Kung is venerated. Sometimes the tablet inscribed the deity as *Tu Ti Leung Sin* (土地龍神). The soil deity is believed to guard over the piece of land charged to him, by Pak Kung. Respondents related that Pak Kung is the boss, while Tu Ti Kung is his assistant. A tatung said, "Pak Kung is a busy deity. He helps people day in and

day out. He also needs rest. Sometimes when Pak Kung is taking a rest or off to see his friends, he will ask Tu Ti Kung to take over for a while.” The explanations describe both deities role as a tutelary deities watching over the wellbeing of people and they are in charge of certain territory.

Another interest observation on the Chinese deities in Singkawang is that, many temples worship Pak Kung together with his spouse *Pak Pho* (伯婆). The image or tablet of Pak Pho is placed side by side with Pak Kung, always to the right side of Pak Kung. It is a local custom for temples with Pak Kung and Pak Pho couple to have its temple celebration<sup>②</sup> on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> lunar month. Temple without the spouse (Pak Pho) organise the celebration on a range of dates including the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month purported as the Ghost Month.<sup>③</sup>

## The Pantheon of Dayak Deities

Similar to Chinese pantheon, the Dayak venerate a range of deities believed to help and protect people from evil spirits, evil spells, misfortunes and illnesses. Although a proportionate of Dayak are Christians or Catholics, there are still a large number who practice traditional beliefs. During fieldwork, the sight of Christian Dayak respondents consulting tatungs was a normal scene. A Christian tatung rectified the belief of Christians in traditional belief as “Sebelum adanya agama, tradisi sudah wujud” (Before the presence of religion, tradition has existed). Veneration of Dayak deities is deemed as a form of traditional practice and not equivalent to religion such as Christianity or Catholicism.

Among the Dayak communities in West Kalimantan especially the Dayak Kanayatn (the most numerous in Singkawang), *Pantak* holds a supreme position

<sup>②</sup> Deity's birthday is called Sin Ming San (神明生) or the acronym HUT (Hari Ulangtahun)

<sup>③</sup> In many Chinese communities such as in Sarawak and West Malaysia, the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month is considered the month the Hell Gate is opened and spirits of the dead roam the human world freely. As a form of respect and also fear, all forms of temple celebrations are refrained, with the exception of the Hungry Ghost Festival. Such is not the case for Singkawang as temple celebrations are organised throughout the year.



in their spiritual world. Its supreme status is akin to *Petara* of the Sarawak Iban. Chinese tatungs described Pantak as similar to *Tai Shong Lo Chun* (太上老君)<sup>②</sup> who holds the highest status among the Chinese deities. Dayak Kanayatn believed that *Pantak* contains the spirits of hero who have fought for the people. The statue is almost always made from belian wood. When a highly respected hero passed away, a ritual is performed to thank and acknowledge the sacrifice and effort of the hero. His status is recognised by the entire community by erecting a *pantak* statue. *Pantak* usually comes in a pair (Photo 1), but that doesn't rule out the existence of single *Pantak* (Photo 2). The spirit of the deceased hero or leader is believed to transfer to *Pantak* statue through ritual and lives on eternally. Not every temple devoted to a *Datok* has *Pantak*. Those that has *Pantak* will worship it everyday as it does to its *Datok*. Those that doesn't will pray to *Pantak* at other temples on special occasion such as the birthday of its *Datok* or before the commencement of special ritual. *Pantak*'s blessing are sought for protection especially during trance and in treating illness caused by malevolent spirits or malicious act of black magic. In the early morning of Cap Go Meh, blood sacrifice is offered to *Pantak* by cutting off the heads of a pair of fowls or slitting the neck of black male dogs (Photo 3). The blood is poured over the altar of *Pantak* and the decapitated head of fowls or dogs are offered to *Pantak* as well (Photo 4). The blood sacrifice is conducted to seek blessing, protection and power when the tatung goes into trance for the parade.

*Pantak* is regarded as the supreme deity thus it doesn't ascend into a human body. In other words, *Pantak* does not require the use of a human body as its mediator between the spiritual world and human world. The wants and needs of *Pantak* are transmitted to its keeper through dream revelation and signs. The keeper is usually a consanguineal kin and this person need not be a tatung. For example, in the case of the *Pantak* at Gunung Sari (as depicted in Photo 1) the

<sup>②</sup> The Grand Supreme Elderly Lord.



Photo 1: Pantak (in pair) at Gunung Sari, Singkawang  
(Source: Elena Chai)



Photo 2: Pantak (single) at  
Jalan Diponegoro, Singkawang  
(Source: Elena Chai)



Photo 3: Blood sacrifice for Pantak  
(Source: Elena Chai)



Photo 4: Head of fowl as offering to Pantak  
(Source: Elena Chai)

keeper dreamed of Pantak asking for a proper altar to be built in November 2016. The keeper lives at the outskirts of the town. He conveyed the message to the tatung of Gunung Sari through telephone. The altar of Pantak was built one month's time after the dream revelation when the tatung strike a huge lottery win.



## Latok and His Altar

By the side of many temples, a small building is noticeable. On the first glance, it looks indifferent to Datok Kong altar, a commonly found deity in Sarawak and West Malaysia. However, the altar houses the spirit of a Dayak deity, favourably called as Latok or sometimes just Datok. Like Chinese altar, there is a censor and sometimes two censors. One for incense and another for kemenyan. Unlike Chinese altar, there is usually no statue or idol of Latok but drawn image of Latok. Sometimes there is just a jar or a mandau behind the censor(s). The jar is adorned with feathers of auspicious birds such as *burung ruai*<sup>②</sup> or *burung enggang*.<sup>③</sup> Some altars have tablet made from wood or clay with Latok's name inscribed.



Photo 5: A Latok altar by the side of temple (Source: Elena Chai)

For altars with drawn image of Latok, he is usually shown as bearded, tanned complexion, stout body build, sitting cross legged on a stone or floor and wearing headgear with feather of *burung ruai*. The facial expression of Latok is usually fierce looking. At the background, natural views such as jungle, river, mountain or sea can be seen and occasionally by Latok's side there is a tiger. Sometimes one on each side.

② *Argusianus argus*.

③ Hornbill.



Photo 6: Latok altar with jar  
(Source: Elena Chai)

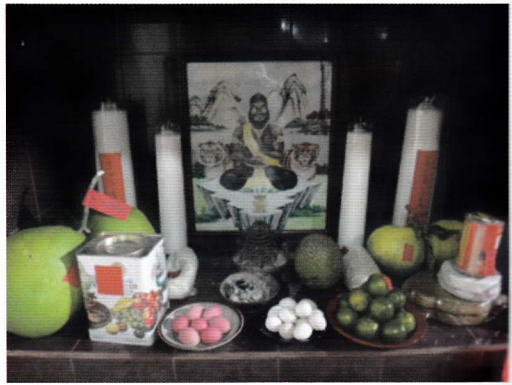


Photo 7: Latok altar with drawn image of Latok  
(Source: Elena Chai)

The Latok deities are believed to be the spirits of warriors and leaders who have helped and served the people. They are depicted as self sacrificial, courageous and heroic. Their undaunting characteristics are feared by the enemies but respected by the people. Latok such as *Panglima Hitam* is believed to be a warrior in prehistoric time and was tremendously fierceful and hot tempered. Latok *Bujang Putih* has a more mellow characteristic and is more approachable. He normally resides in the jungle while Latok Panglima Hitam watch over mountains. *Latok Tujuh Pulau* is believed to be the guardian of the islands in the South Sea. He is able to control the waves and fishermen pray to him for safety and bountiful catch. Some Latoks are believed to have special ability in hunting, planting, fishing and taming wild animals. Latok are usually venerated through the words of another deity, either Chinese deity or a Latok. Sometimes it is through the revelation of dreams that a Latok beseech to be worship. The common scenarios are depicted as follow. A devotee tormented by mysterious illness seek for help from a deity. The deity speaking through its tatung diagnosed the problem arises from a certain Latok who has resurrected and wishes to be venerated. The illness of the devotee can only be cured either if he agrees to help erect an altar for the Latok or to be the Latok's spirit medium. In most cases, it



would require both whereby an altar is build and the devotee becomes the medium for the Latok where he is worshipped. Other scenario would be a tatung 'meets' another Latok while in trance and transmit the message to the temple assistant or the devotees. There are also instances whereby Latok appear in dreams implored to be placated.

The fearless, self sacrificial nature of Latok afford them with respect and trust. Devotees seek for their help in a myriad of situation such as encounter with penunggu, mysterious illness and unexplainable happenings. Mysterious or sudden illnesses or even changed in behaviour are believed to be caused by a few reasons. For example, a person who is outside the house or riding a motorcycle might coincidentally encounter a wondering ghost. The mischievous ghost might enter the body of the person and cause the person to behave in strange manners. Upon reaching home, the person become odd with sudden scream, laughter or cry for no apparent reason. The person might also be on rage and start hitting people or throwing things. In normal circumstance the family members will bring the person to a Latok for cure (Photo 8). Latok's fierceness is believed to be able to ward off the evil spirit successfully.

Illnesses can also be caused when a person encounter magical elements such as *bola api terbang* (flying fire balls). It is believed that people practising black magic try out their craft by chanting spells over fire balls. If the fire balls fly directly over a person's head, the person will fall sick. If the fire balls touches a person, the person will become seriously ill. It is a widespread belief that one should not leave laundry outside in the open lest a bola api flies by and touches the laundry. The person wearing the piece of cloth will become sick. Latok will get rid of the spells by using chants to counter the spell and help to cleanse the body of the victim.

In many instances, jealousy can attract untoward happenings whereby a spell is cast by some unscrupulous green-eyed. The Chinese call the action of being cast by spells as 'piong tor'. A woman who loses hair abruptly or suffer

irritating itch might have been ‘piong tor’ by a jealous admirer. If she seeks help from a Latok deity, the deity will write some talisman, burn and dip it into a cup of water. She will be asked to drink the purification water. The Latok will then write another talisman and asked the woman to burn it into a big basin of water with five types of flowers. The water is then used to wash off the ‘spell’ from her body.



Photo 8: A Latok tatung healing a possessed woman  
(Source: Elena Chai)

## Prayers and offerings

Just as in the worship of Chinese deities, devotees usually light candles and incense to pray to Latok. Many prefer to differentiate the use of white candles for Latok and the red ones for Chinese deities. Black incense is also the preferred one for Latok, instead of the normal beige type. However it is just a preference. Some devotees do not differentiate the use of candles nor incense for Latok. When approached a female devotee regarding this, her reply was, “As long as we come, pray to him, he is glad. Any colour of incense or candles will do. When we light the candles, incense we are telling him we have come to pray to him. As long as we have the heart to come pray to him, even without any offerings, Latok knows.”



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at the same altar. Tatungs are the best reference to know about the existence of Latok deities at certain altar. As mentioned earlier on, a tatung is with the ability to let different deities to ascend into his body. A tatung who is normally possessed by Latok Bujang Putih might be possessed by a different Latok. It all depends on the tatung, the deity and also if there is a consultation with a devotee, depends on the needs of the devotee. Dayak deities like Chinese deities do not discriminate against ethnic background of the tatungs. There are plenty of Chinese tatungs possessed by Dayak deities and vice versa. When the tatungs are in trance, language is no barrier to them. They will speak the language of their deities.

In big temple, there is usually a master tatung with many years of experience. The role of the master tatung is to guide and train junior tatungs or those who have just started to be possessed. The junior tatungs are called as 'anak buah' or disciple of the master tatung. The local believes in two types of of tatung: those who have the bloodline of tatung in the family. Usually such tatung will be selected by a deity at a suitable age and the deity is one that has been served by one of his or her forebears. The other type of tatung is those who learn the art of spirit mediumship by training under a master. The master will teach him how to purify his body by taking certain meals or by conducting certain prayers over a length of time. The master will also invite a deity to ascend into the disciple's body and test if the disciple is a suitable candidate to serve the deity. Both types of tatung (with bloodline or with training) needs the guidance of a master. An inexperienced tatung will not be able to let the deity ascend and leave his body successfully. In a worse scenario, the deity might leave the tatung's body abruptly while in trance and this might cause the tatung to get hurt badly. The author witnessed a junior tatung's foot being pierced right through a sharp blade while rocking a knife-laden sedan chair. It is believed that the deity took flight from the tatung's body in a sudden manner. The tatung's foot was severely injured and required over 30 stitches on the wound.

Prayers at Latok's altars do not follow any routine dates, like prayers offered to Chinese deities on the first day and the fifteen day of the Chinese lunar month. Devotees dropby at their convenient time but usually after night fall. The reason being this is the best time to consult Latok through his tatung. Temples with Latok altars are especially crowded and vibrant on Thursday night (which the local call 'malam Jumaat') as this is the night when tatungs pray to their Latok and have their weapons such as mandau, *tangkin*<sup>⑨</sup> blessed. Some with special charms or oil will have it blessed by fuming over the kemenyan incense while the master tatung goes into trance to do the blessing.



Photo 9: Bucket of water dipped in mat cho leaves for the use of Chinese deities



Photo 10: Bucket of water dipped in mat cho and daun juang for the use of Latok deities

## The Female Latok

There are also altars dedicated to female Latok called as Latok Pho or sometimes Nek.<sup>⑩</sup> Unlike the worship of Pak Kung and Pak Pho, the author has never witnessed altar worshipping Latok and Latok Pho. The worship of Latok Pho is similar to Latok's. Censor for incense and censor for kemenyan are placed in front of the altar. Some altars have the image of Latok Pho while others have just a tablet with her name. Devotees come to seek for Latok Pho's help for

⑨ A traditional weapon used by Dayak warriors. Similar to mandau but shorter in length.

⑩ Short term for 'nenek' which means 'grandmother' in Bahasa Indonesia.



divination of luck, marriages and especially for childbirth related matters. Latok Pho is believed to be able to help mothers-to-be to have safe delivery, and is able to assist in turning the position of breech baby during late pregnancy. A Latok Pho tatung nearby Kaliasin area is famous for such ability. Pregnant mothers accompanied by their family members bring flowers, coconut, fried banana fritters, local dessert to pay respect and seek for Latok Pho's blessing and help before childbirth. When the baby was successfully delivered, the family members will visit Latok Pho again to thank her and also to seek for further blessing during the confinement period. The tatung of Latok Pho will usually go in trance and write talisman to ward off evil spirits from harming the child and mother. The local strongly believe in the existence of a female ghost with long fingernails. The ghost called *Chong Siu Zi Kap Kui* (長手指甲鬼) is said to be attracted to post partum blood. She will suck the post partum blood and caused the mother to bleed to death. Special precaution is needed to avoid the attack of this fearsome ghost and Latok Pho is believed to be skillful in providing the talisman to ward off the ghost.

At Jalan Kalimantan, center of Singkawang town, it is enthralling to learn that devotees called a female Latok as Latok Moi instead of Latok Pho. Devotees and also the temple keeper said that the image depicts a very young and beautiful female Latok, therefore she should not be called a "Pho", instead should be called a "Moi". Amoi is the usual Hakka calling for young women. Thus, when devotees pray to this deity, they acknowledge her as Latok Moi. She is believed to be potent in helping single man and woman to find their other half. If a lover has gone straying, this female deity is believed to be able to 'call' back the lover and make him stay. The ritual requires five types of flowers, clothes of five colour, the blood shedding of a fowl, and other common food offerings. Once the lover has returned, the Latok Moi must be thanked with prayers and offerings of her favourite delicacies such as local desserts made from coconut.



Photo 10: Altar of Latok Pho  
(Source: Elena Chai)

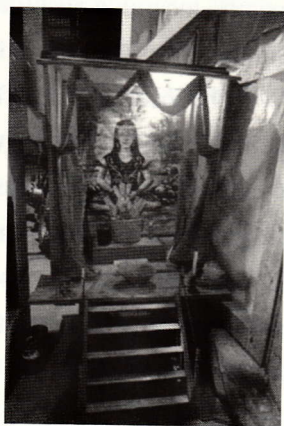


Photo 11: Altar of Latok Moi  
(Source: Elena Chai)

## Concluding Remarks

The veneration of Dayak deities is a cultural practice for Chinese in Singkawang and other towns in West Kalimantan from Sekura, Sambas to Pemangkat, Sungai Pinyuh, Sungai Raya, Mempawah and Pontianak. This ethnographic paper provides some description to Latok worship in Singkawang but the structure of the Dayak deity's belief in West Kalimantan remains the same. The polytheistic nature of Chinese beliefs embodies the belief of diverse tutelary gods that guide over the wellbeing of the people. The Dayak's belief in a supreme god and the transformation of deceased warriors, heroes into benevolent deities is no peculiarity for the Chinese. The setting of the altar, the paraphernalia, organization of rituals for Latok are easy to follow and carry out. The availability of Latok deity provide another alternative in the attempt to deal with problems that defy ordinary exposition. The stories and tales about penunggu, the threats of spells and unexplainable illnesses create anxiety and tension for the people. The availability of Dayak deity to help and guard them is an added protection to the uncertainty that lingers. Dayak deities are portrayed as tutelary guardians in



specific locations, just like Thai Pak Kung. The places they guard closer to nature and they possess a more localised favour.

The insecurity and fear of contact with the supernatural in the nature such as the inhabitants (penunggu) affect the daily lives of the people. West Kalimantan is considered one of the more impoverished province in Indonesia due to its geographical isolation and rural urban disparity. Most of the local population depends on land as a source of subsistence, such as farming, mining, fishing, collecting forest products, etc. The output is meager and usually just enough to cater for the families or to sell at the local market. The basic infrastructure are still lacking in this part of the country. Even urban towns like Singkawang, Mempawah, Sambas and Bengkayang have limited access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. Healthcare are very restricted and hospitals are confined to the bigger towns like Pontianak and Singkawang. Literacy rate remains low as parents are incapable to provide for the basic needs in schooling, such as purchasing stationaries, uniforms and payments of school fees. Such basic deprivation translate into great amount of uncertainty, insecurity and grievances.

The profane and mundane world they experienced intertwined with their sense of being in this world. The answers to the many unexplainable mundane experience are provided by the profane world. Thus, visits, consultations with deities seeking for redress and solutions are the norms. Deities through their mediums take over the roles of medical practitioner by diagnosing the ailment and by writing prescription of cures and herbal medicines. They also provide psychological needs to reduce stress and tension by providing answers and solutions to the unexplainable conditions faced by the devotees. Besides that, through prayers and rituals, devotees gain a sense of control to face the challenges of daily reality. The worship of Dayak deity, as mentioned earlier, is an added alternative to confront the ebbs and flows of life.

The role of tatungs in West Kalimantan indefinitely have profound effect on the lives of the people. They are the intermediary between the mundane and



profane world. They serve the deities by helping people with their special ability. They serve the people by providing solutions and answers given by the deities. Their existence in the social structure of the communities are formidable. The staging of tatungs in Cap Go Meh render them with great honour and respect from both the community and the local government. However, it should not be looked upon as just "a staging of peoplehood" as argued by Chan (2013). The underlying reasons for participation during the event should be interrogated. Tatungs in West Kalimantan are required to register under the Office of Buddhist Community of Guidance (BIMAS Buddha) to enable them to participate in the Cap Go Meh event and also to qualify them to obtain financial assistance for the half day event. Although there was no official statement from BIMAS, many tatung felt obliged to participate each year lest their registration will be forfeited. That in turn will delegitimize their role in operating the temple and in serving the deities and people. Each year many tatungs who are working outside Kalimantan or Indonesia travel back to participate in the parade so that they do risk losing their registration. In addition to that there are also other motivation in the participation of the event such as a sense of self fulfilment, acknowledgement from the people and government, and fraternity with other tatungs.

To reiterate, the practices, belief and symbolism in Chinese and Dayak deities pervade many areas of the community's lives. It provides a solution to tackle the social and existential problems of the day. This paper is only able to provide a segment of Chinese beliefs in Kalimantan. It is envisaged that more work could be carried out in this part of Borneo where diversity is abundant and unity is treasured.

## Acknowledgements

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